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Chicago, Illinois

August 26, 2026

Supreme Court Rules Committee

Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts

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Submitted via email to RulesCommittee@illinoiscourts.gov

Re: Public Comment in Support of Proposal 26-07 (Amends Supreme Court Rule 906) and Proposal 25-09 (Amends Supreme Court Rule 46) — September 3, 2026 Public Hearing

To the Members of the Supreme Court Rules Committee:

My name is Retrinda Alley. I am a self-represented litigant in a domestic relations case in the Circuit Court of Cook County, Illinois, Domestic Relations Division (Case No. 2010 D 080864, consolidated with 2014 D 053377). I am writing to share my own experience and to urge the Committee to adopt Proposal 26-07 and Proposal 25-09.

On Proposal 26-07 — Attorney Training in Intimate Partner Domestic Abuse Before GAL Appointment

A Guardian ad Litem has been appointed in my case. On information and belief, current Illinois court rules do not require an attorney to complete any specific training in intimate partner domestic abuse before being appointed as a Guardian ad Litem or child representative, even in a case where that history is part of the record. I have lived the consequences of a system that asks a Guardian ad Litem to weigh in on a child's best interest without first requiring that person to understand how domestic abuse, coercive control, and post-separation abuse actually operate. Proposal 26-07 would close that gap by requiring four hours of training in intimate partner domestic abuse within the two years before appointment. I ask the Committee to adopt it.

Child Representatives, When Appointed, Should Meet the Same Training Minimum

In some cases, including cases like mine, a court appoints both a Guardian ad Litem and a separate child representative under 750 ILCS 5/506(a-3), each investigating the case and directly shaping the outcome for the child. Both roles fall within the category of “attorneys appointed by the court to participate in child custody, allocation of parental responsibilities, visitation, and parenting time matters” that Rule 906 already governs, and the rule’s own existing curriculum lists “roles of guardian ad litem and child representative” together as a single training topic. I ask the Committee to make explicit, in adopting Proposal 26-07, that the four-hour intimate partner domestic abuse training requirement applies at minimum equally to any attorney serving as a child representative, not only to those serving as a Guardian ad Litem, whether the two roles are appointed together or separately in the same case.

Judges Hold Final Authority Over GAL Recommendations — Their Training Should Match or Exceed What Is Proposed for GALs

Under Illinois law, a Guardian ad Litem’s recommendation is advisory only — it is never binding on the judge. The controlling statute, 750 ILCS 5/506, states that a GAL appointment “is not intended to nor should it serve to place any appointed individual in the role of a surrogate judge,” and that nothing in the GAL’s role may “abrogate the decision making power of the trier of fact.” Illinois courts have repeatedly confirmed this: the judge is the “ultimate fact finder,” not the GAL (*In re Marriage of Saheb & Khazal*, 377 Ill. App. 3d 615, 628 (2007)), and “the court [is] not bound by the recommendation of the guardian ad litem” (*Taylor v. Starkey*, 20 Ill. App. 3d 630, 634 (1974)). A judge may accept, modify, or reject a GAL’s recommendation entirely, for any reason within the judge’s discretion.

On information and belief, I am aware of a related case in which a paid GAL recommended supervised or no visitation, and the judge overruled that recommendation and ordered 50/50 parenting time regardless.

This is the gap the Committee should not leave open. If Proposal 26-07 requires every GAL to complete four hours of intimate partner domestic abuse training before appointment, the person with the final and unreviewable authority over the outcome — the judge — should be

held to the same standard, not a lesser one. Current Illinois Supreme Court Rule 908 requires judges assigned to hear child-custody cases to attend a broad seminar, covering domestic violence as only one of several listed topics, at least once every two years — there is no dedicated, hours-specific intimate partner abuse training requirement for judges comparable to what Proposal 26-07 would require of GALs. Separately, a bill that would create a dedicated, statewide, biennial domestic violence training program specifically for judges — the Judicial Domestic Violence Training Act, Senate Bill 68 of the 104th General Assembly — was introduced but has been stalled in committee since March 21, 2025, and has not been enacted.

Because judges make the final decision in every case — not only the ones where a GAL happens to be appointed — I ask the Committee to recommend that judges assigned to child custody and allocation of parental responsibilities matters be required to complete intimate partner domestic abuse training equal to, or greater than, what Proposal 26-07 would require of GALs, and no less often. If four hours every two years is the floor for a GAL whose word is only a recommendation, it should be at least the floor — and arguably higher — for the judge whose word is the order.

On Proposal 25-09 — Verbatim Record of Domestic Violence Act Proceedings

In my own case, no court reporter was present at the hearing where my petition for an order of protection was decided. I raised this same concern earlier this year in my testimony to the Cook County Task Force on Violence Against Women: without a verbatim record, there is no way to know exactly what was said, no way to correct the record, and no meaningful way to appeal. Proposal 25-09 would require courts to keep a stenographic or electronic record of every proceeding under the Illinois Domestic Violence Act, the Stalking No Contact Order Act, the Civil No Contact Order Act, and Section 112A of the Code of Criminal Procedure — even when, as in my case, that proceeding is folded into another matter rather than filed as a stand-alone case. I ask the Committee to adopt this proposal as well.

This Is Not an Isolated Gap — Public Records Show a Pattern

On information and belief, and based on publicly available Cook County Circuit Court case records, the opposing party in my case has been a party to numerous other domestic relations

matters — spanning parentage actions, a dissolution of marriage, and child support enforcement cases — filed by multiple different petitioners over more than a decade. Like mine, several of these matters have involved a Guardian ad Litem appointment, contempt findings, and repeated enforcement filings. Each case has been handled by the Domestic Relations Division as a separate, self-contained matter, with no mechanism connecting them or flagging a respondent's history across filings to the judge or Guardian ad Litem assigned to any one of them. This is precisely the kind of gap Proposal 26-07 and Proposal 25-09 are positioned to help close: a trained Guardian ad Litem and judge, working from a complete and verbatim record, are far better equipped to recognize a pattern of abuse or non-compliance than an isolated case file will ever reveal on its own. I raise this not to relitigate any other matter, but so the Committee understands that the training and recordkeeping gaps described above are not hypothetical — for a family in a case like mine, they compound, case after case, with no institutional memory carried between them.

Conclusion

Domestic relations courts make life-altering decisions about safety, custody, and family. Requiring trained Guardians ad Litem and a verbatim record of every domestic-violence-related proceeding are two modest, overdue steps that would make the system safer and more accountable for every family that comes through it — including mine. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Retrinda Alley

Self-represented litigant, Case No. 2010 D 080864